



STATE OF DELAWARE
DEPARTMENT OF CORRECTION
OFFICE OF MEDIA RELATIONS
245 MCKEE ROAD
DOVER, DELAWARE 19904
Telephone: (302) 739-5601
Fax: (302) 739-8220

Beth Welch
Chief of Media Relations

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE
March 16, 2005

Contact: Beth Welch
Phone: 302-739-5601 ext. 232
Pager: 302-474-0511

Press Release

Delaware Inmates Take Part in Important Beach Preservation Project *Offenders Grow, Harvest then Re-Plant Beach Grass Along Shoreline*



SUSSEX COUNTY – A group of Delaware inmates is taking part this week in an important beach preservation project.

The inmates, from the Sussex Violation of Probation Center in Georgetown, today re-planted hundreds of stems of beach grass along the Atlantic shoreline just north of Fenwick Island, DE.

The project is a first-year collaboration between the Department of Correction and the Department of Natural Resources and Environmental Control to stabilize sand dunes

along the Delaware coastline.

Last spring, inmates at the VOP Center planted three acres of beach grass. Over the summer and fall, they weeded and fertilized the grass. Earlier this week, they harvested the grass, collecting 500 bundles. Today was the first day of the re-planting portion of the project. In all, thousands of bundles of beach grass, grown by the inmates, will be re-planted along the coastline, from Broadkill Beach to Fenwick Island.

"The beach grass grown by the inmates is of excellent quality," said DNREC conservationist Jim Mullen. "Their beach grass is as good as the grass we buy from a commercial grower."

Beach grass stabilizes Delaware's sand dunes. Blades of grass trap wind-blown sand which can create new dunes and expand existing dunes. Sand dunes provide protection against damaging coastal storms by absorbing wave energy. Sand dunes also act as major sand storage areas that replenish sand to eroded beaches during storm events. Without sand dunes, storm waves rush inland and flood properties. (DNREC website)

"These inmates are making a significant and important contribution to protecting Delaware's coastline," said Mullen. "We thank the DOC for its efforts and commitment to Delaware beach preservation."

This is the first year of a collaborative effort between the DOC and DNREC. In previous years, DNREC purchased all its beach grass from a Maryland company. This year, DNREC has been able to cut back on its out-of-state purchase of beach grass because of the DOC project. Next year, DNREC plans on getting its entire beach grass harvest from the Department of Correction. DNREC estimates it is saving thousands of dollars by having inmates grow and re-plant the grass.

Community service projects instill in inmates good work ethics and disciplines. Some projects also teach inmates a skill that can be transferred back to the community once they're released from custody. Additionally, community service allows the offender to feel like a contributing member of society. This fiscal year, DOC inmates are expected to perform more than 150,000 hours of community service. Inmates participate in projects that benefit cities and towns, churches, American Legions, senior and recreation centers and schools.

"We want to be good neighbors and good community members," said Sussex VOP Deputy Warden Bill Oettel. "We are happy to assist state agencies and communities with their needs and are gratified to know that the work being done with the beach grass will benefit the environment."

The Sussex Violation of Probation Center primarily houses offenders who have violated the terms of their probation. These "rules breakers" have not committed any crimes during their probation in the community. They have committed "technical" violations that could include failing to report to their probation officer, changing residence without notifying their probation officer or failing to abide by their curfew. The DOC believes such violations warrant brief periods of incarceration.